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Can't Shake the Blues: Do Worry and Attention Flexibility Enervate Cognitive Emotion Regulation Outcomes?

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Abstract

Depression is a mood disorder that is characterized by enduring feelings of sadness that are often accompanied by psychovegetative symptoms and attentional deficits that result in functional impairment. Depression is often hallmarked by biased attention towards negative information that once activated, remains in depressed persons conscious awareness. Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) often co-occurs with depression, and is also characterized by enduring negative information processing in the form of worry that consumes a significant amount of an individual's thought processes. Both disorders are marked by emotion regulation deficits in the form of responses that usually reduce distress, but that fail to work for those with either disorder. Despite the high rates of co-occurrence, relatively little is known about the effect that GAD has on the relationship between depression and emotion regulation outcomes. Given that worry is a cognitive process that evokes and maintains negative information in conscious awareness, it is feasible that GAD may interfere with the effects of emotion regulation responses that leverage cognitive resources to bring forth and maintain positive emotions, such as by recalling pleasant memories (positive autobiographical memory, PAM). Deficits in attentional processes may further reduce PAM's effectiveness. This study examined these possibilities among community dwelling adults.